

SECRET Security Information

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## COMMUNISM AND ISLAM: THE CHINESE ASPECTS

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The current program of the Chinese Communists in which they appear to be catering to the various minority races of China in order to win support for their regime and its policies, as well as the constantly recurring references to dissident activities attributed to the Chinese Moslems of the Northwest, makes it of interest to study the present situation of Islam in Communist China. Any study of this question might well proceed from a consideration of the essential difference in the status of the approximately ten million Moslems and that of other religious groups on the mainland of China today.

Estimates of the overall Moslem population of China vary tremendously (from 8 to 48 million). The latter figure is often cited by Moslem leaders. On 6 June 1953 the official Communist news organ, the "People's Daily" gave certain statistical data on the Moslem population. Their figure is about 10 million for the nine Islamic nationalities (see Table No 1).

TABLE NO 1

## Islamic Nationalities

Mohammedans (Hui-tsu) (Appear to be Han Chinese who adhere to the Moslem faith)	5 to 6,000,000	The Northwest (Kansu, Shensi, Ninghsia, Tsinghai, Sinkiang, Yunnan, Shantung, Honan, Hopei, etc)
Uighurs (Turki)	3,400,000	All parts of Sinkiang where they comprise 70 percent of population
Kazaks	400,000	Principally in Sinkiang some in Kansu and Tsinghai
Kirghiz	60 to 80,000	Sinkiang
Tajiks	50 to 60,000	Sinkiang
Tunghsiang	over 100,000	Kansu (southwest of Lanchou)
Salars	300,000	Tsinghai and Kansu
Uzbeks	10,000	Sinkiang
Tatars	6,000	Sinkiang

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Approximately 5 million Chinese Moslems are scattered throughout China. Somewhat over 2 million inhabit Kansu, Ninghsia, and Tsinghai. The latter are the most important and cohesive of the Chinese Moslem groups in China. They are descendants of Arab merchants who entered western China in the seventh and eighth centuries. Although much of their material culture has been derived from the Han\* Chinese, they have retained, in addition to their religion, certain customs and traits definitely setting them apart from the Han. They differ little from the Chinese economically, although a few occupations, such as innkeeper, trader, and soldier, attract a much larger proportion of Moslems than Chinese.

Two small but important non-Chinese Moslem groups (the Salars and the Tunghsiang) are located in the Kansu-Tsinghai border area. The Salars are a group of Turki-speaking peoples who came from Samarkand during the 12th century and live southeast of Hsinging, the capital of Tsinghai. As a group they have resisted the transfer of Chinese Culture and have figured prominently in Moslem revolts against Chinese authority. The Tunghsiang or "East Country" Moslems inhabit a triangular area formed by the juncture of the Yellow and Tao Rivers in Kansu near the Tsinghai border and south and east of Lanchow, the capital of Kansu. Like the Salars, they have remained a militantly resistant and homogeneous community and have played important roles in recent Moslem uprisings.

By far the majority of non-Chinese Moslems are the Turkic people of Sinkiang Province. The Turki, or Uighurs, who number more than 3 million, live chiefly in oasis cities rimming the Tarim Basin, principally the towns of the southwest, and comprise the largest non-Chinese Moslem group within China. Together with the other Moslems of Sinkiang they have participated in rebellions against Chinese authority, and general relationships with the Chinese have been turbulent and complex. The close linguistic, religious and other cultural ties of the people of Sinkiang with people across the border in the Soviet Union has contributed to the complex political situation of this area.

Because of their dissimilarities with their Han Chinese neighbors, the Moslem groups have a tendency to feel that they are a people apart. The Communists, recognizing this, are exerting a major effort to overcome this attitude. Within China itself, as previously shown, many of the Moslems are non-Han Chinese and there are, therefore, both ethnic and political considerations involved. Especially is this true in the Northwest, where the great bulk of the population, while Moslem in religion, is predominantly Turkic rather than Chinese. Present Chinese Communist political control in Sinkiang, for example, must rest on a population which is probably 90 percent Moslem and which is related ethnically to the Turkic people of Russian Central Asia. Historically, Moslem separatism has played an important and explosive role in the politics of Central Asia. There were widespread Moslem uprisings, both in Northwest China and Yunnan, during the latter half of the 19th century under the Ch'ing dynasty, and any governing regime in modern China is conscious of this fact. The Moslems, more than any other significant minority in China in recent times, have had a territorial basis for power and have thus been able to exercise an autonomous political influence within the body politic of China. Chinese Communist policy today thus tends to be circumspect in practice vis-a-vis the Moslems.

\* The Han, as referred to herein, concerns the ethnic group which originated in central China and whose culture and ethnic forms remained relatively undisturbed by contacts with the bordering cultures.

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The Chinese Communists, therefore, like the National Government, view the adherents of Islam not only as a religious community but also (like the Mongols, Manchus and Tibetans) as a distinct ethnic group. The fact that the Communists attach this ethnic aspect to the question means in practice that the Moslems tend to receive a certain amount of favorable treatment in accordance with the general Chinese communist emphasis on "minority nationality" work. Other religious groups in Communist China, considered solely as such, are almost certainly marked for eventual extinction except where they compromise and permit themselves to be utilized as instruments of Communist political power. Generally speaking, this is the case with the Buddhist, for example, except in the inner frontier provinces of China and in Tibet where somewhat different ethnic and economic problems are found in connection with Lamaism. It is also the case with the Christians, both Catholic and Protestant, who are regarded by the Communists as tainted by their historical association with Western missionaries and who are thus also in a different position from the Moslems of China.

There is also the consideration that China's Moslems, as a religious bloc, are an organic part of the Islamic world of Southwest Asia, an area in which Communism has obvious political ambitions. Kashmir and Afghanistan are geographically contiguous with Communist China and full diplomatic relations are maintained by the Peking regime with Pakistan as well as Indonesia (Afghanistan has recognized the Peking regime but there has been no reciprocal exchange of diplomatic representatives). While there is indeed some question as to how much the average Moslem in China actually feels himself to be an integral part of the non-Chinese Islamic world, the international aspects of the question are nevertheless pertinent.

The rather complex role - embodying religious, ethnic, political, and international factors - which the Moslems thus play in Communist China was actually brought out at the inception of the present regime in the autumn of 1949. At that time, the Moslems were represented at the People's Political Consultative Conference (PPCC) both in the "democratic religious circles" category (by one delegate) and also in the "minority nationalities" category (by four delegates). The Communist program of establishing regional autonomous areas which was devised largely because the Moslem problem, has resulted in several Moslem or predominantly Moslem areas. Some of the more important of these are the Tacheng, Hui, Tunghsiang, Kueisui Moslem, and Hsihaiku Moslem Autonomous Areas (see Table No 2). More recently a "China Islamic Association" under the chairmanship of PAO Erh-han has been established and recognized to handle the racial, religious, cultural (and political) relations of the Moslems with the Communist regime. More minor considerations have been certain concessions to the religious customs which would otherwise conflict with Communist regulations. The overall Agrarian Reform Law of June 1950 (Article 3) stated; "Some or all land owned by Mosques may be retained by them subject to the consent of the Moslems residing in the area." This stipulation has probably been generally respected in the Northwest. In December 1950 it was officially announced that the Government Administrative Council had issued an order granting exemption from the slaughter tax to beef and mutton consumed by Moslem communities during the celebration of the three major festivals of the year "in deference to established custom of the Moslems." This order was issued to all local authorities with the added provision that, in places where restrictions were exercised over the slaughter of cattle and sheep, these might be relaxed on the occasion of the principal Islamic festivals.

**SECRET Security Information****TABLE NO 2****Important Moslem Autonomous Areas**

<b>Tacheng Autonomous Area</b>	<b>North China</b>	<b>17,000 Moslems</b>
<b>Kueisui Moslem Autonomous Area</b>	<b>North China</b>	<b>Population unknown (60% Moslem)</b>
<b>Hui Autonomous Area</b>	<b>North China</b>	<b>4,400 Moslems</b>
<b>Hsihaiku Moslem Autonomous Area*</b>	<b>Northwest</b>	<b>490,000 (47% Moslems)</b>
<b>Tunghsiang Autonomous Area</b>	<b>Northwest</b>	<b>160,000 Moslems</b>

\* To be established at a later date.

Thus the Islamic peoples of China today, because of their numbers, strategic location and political, religious, and cultural ties with the other sections of the Moslem world constitute an important element in Chinese society. This importance is recognized by the Chinese Communist regime in its drive towards complete control of the country. The regime has, on this account, deviated from usual Communist policies such as the suppression of religion. In providing some justification for these deviations, the Communists have minimized the concessions to the Moslems as a religious group by attempting to handle their problems as those of an ethnic group. On those occasions when the Moslem problem was necessarily regarded in the religious light, the maximum advantage has been made by propagandizing the "religious freedom" of the "minority nationalities" of the Chinese "People's Government". There can be little doubt that these concessions to the religious practices of the Moslems, like the other religious minorities, as well as the loudly-proclaimed regional autonomy movement will be curtailed as soon as the Communists feel certain of their control over the country. At that time, conversely, the Moslem people will probably demonstrate more forcibly and openly their presently latent hostility to the regime.

SOURCES: American Consulate General, Hongkong, Current Background No. 195, 25 July 52.  
 NIS 39, Section 42.  
 AFPE Intelligence Digest Vol 1, No. 6, 17 March 53.  
 CIA, Geographic Intelligence Report, CIA/RR-G-7, 3 July 53.

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